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U.S.-Libyan Confrontation

RATHER: Now that the U.S. fleet is gone from the Gulf of Sidra, more boasts and threats

today from Libya's leader Muammar Qaddafi. He says, louder, that he has, quote, the right to hit any American targets anywhere in the world.

Rita Braver reports that whatever else U.S. officials may think of Qaddafi, they don't think he's all talk and no action.

RITA BRAVER: It was with the gruesome slaughter of a cow that Muammar Qaddafi denounced the U.S., a bloody ceremony symbolic of terrorist attacks he pledged against Americans.

In fact, U.S. officials say, Qaddafi was preparing to strike even before the Gulf of Sidra actions. They cite intelligence reports that several dozen overseas U.S. government and private concerns are active targets, from embassies to military bases to private businesses.

U.S. Embassy personnel in the Middle East, in particular Khartoum and Cairo, have been under surveillance by Libyans. There's been surveillance in Western Europe, too. And last week Qaddafi sent messages to his operatives in Europe with vague orders to prepare for action against Americans.

ROBERT LAMB: In some countries we do have guards on every employee. Maybe not bodyguards, but we protect them adequately in the office. We try to protect them when they go home at night. We sometimes we even provide armored cars for people to travel to and from work in.

BRAVER: Security has increased at foreign and domestic military bases, though U.S. officials believe overseas attacks are most likely.

And experts say, as he did for the Vienna and Rome airport massacres, Qaddafi will recruit non-Libyans to carry out the attacks.

HENRY SCHULER: Really, nationality is irrelevant there. He can find people to support with funds and stolen passports from pretty much all over the world.

BRAVER: But the White House says any action linked to Libya will provoke swift retribution. One official explained the Gulf of Sidra proves the United States will be very assertive.